

Guide to the Grammar of Motion Design

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Motion Design uses a combination of film language and graphic design in motion. Outlined below are some of the main elements that the grammar of filmic communication.

What do we see in screen media?

Moving pictures have three dimensions: width, height and depth.

The Line

'The Line', is a joining of any two separated objects, people or things, which may be seen or unseen, between an action that may happen.

Aspect Ratio

For film in 16 mm the ration of 1.66:1 is used, which translates into a 3" by 5" frame. Academy aperture is 1.33:1 Widescreen in America is 1.85:1 Anamorphic is 2.35:1 70 mm is 2.2:1

Safe Area

In America, the safe area for screen action is 90%. A further 10% is considered needed to be safe for text, such as titles.

Bluescreen

A luminous, highly chromatic background that separates the foreground action to allow superimposition in postproduction. May also be red or green.

Elements of the Shot:

Motivation

Is that part of the shot that gives the editor the reason or motivation, to cut to another shot.

Information

Each shot should have new information for the audience.

Sound

Sound differs from vision in a very important way in motion design. In vision we choose what we want to see, in sound the eyes have no choice.

Continuity

Maintaining the established flow of visual and aural production detail between takes. There are five main parts to continuity.

Depth of Field

The amount of space in front of and at the back of the focus that appears acceptably sharp through the lens.

Screen Direction

Essential to establishing the visual flow of a collection of shots.

Discovery

This includes any shot that begins away from the action and then a camera movement that reveals a scene.

Spin Around

Involves circling the camera around the scene

Point of View

Or POV, meaning that the audience sees exactly what a character in a film sees.

Inventory Point of View

The character carries an object in front of his face, a gun for example. The first person shooter format in video games is an example of this.

Camera Movement

Dolly

Also called a 'tracking shot'. The camera moves on dolly tracks.

Pan

The camera swivels on the horizontal axis, often used to follow the action.

Tilt

The camera pivots up and down from its base which does not move to create an angle.

Zoom

Refers to the movement of a zoom lens

Continuum of Movement

The eye is always attracted by movement. The audience's point of attention will always follow a moving object. Continuum of movements deals with two concepts.

1) Continuum of Movement

How the viewer's point of attention moves within the shot.

2) Continuum from Shot to Shot

How the viewer's point of attention moves from shot to shot.

Composition:

A shot is made up of:

Framing

A frame is a limit to a view

The Illusion of Depth

On a two-dimensional screen, depth is obviously an illusion.

The subjects or objects within the frame

The placing and the movement of the subjects or objects within a frame is also based on convention.

Framing Shots:

Establishing Shot

Often a wide shot of the location, it tells the audience where they are. Typically a long shot at the beginning of a scene designed to inform viewers of the location and to orient them to the mood and placement of subjects in a scene.

Master Shot

The viewpoint of the scene in which the relationship of the spatial relationships of the subject are clearly described and understood. The action could be clearly understood if no other shots were used.

Extreme Close-Up

A shot with a very narrow point of view that gives the impression that the camera is very close to the subject.

Close-Up

Same as above, but with a slightly larger field of view.

Medium Shot

A shot in which the field of view is between those of the long shot and the close up.

Full Figure

Shot composed around the scale of a full human figure

Long Shot

A shot giving a broad view of the visual field.

Wide Shot

Shot composed to see a wide vista

Single

A shot with only one person

Two shot

The camera frames to characters in a scene

Edits**Flash Cut**

An extremely brief shot (maybe even as short as one frame) that is nearly subliminal in effect. Also can be used as a series of short, staccato shots to create a rhythmic effect.

Intercut

The alternating of shots from two or more scenes to indicate parallel action.

Jump Cut

The linkage of shots in a scene in which the appearance of real, continuous time has been interrupted by omission.

Match Cut

Two shots of the same action joined so that the continuous motion is preserved.

Montage

An assembly of shots cut in such a way to shock the viewer through contrasts and contradiction. Often called the Montage of Attractions by its inventor Sergie Eisenstein who directed 'Battleship Potempkin', 1925.

Graphic Match Action

Two scenes are joined by the matching of symbolic or graphic elements to give a new meaning to the scene by the edit or transition. For example cross fade from clock to wheels or cogs, suggests the wheels and industry, and time and motion.

Insert

Frequently a close-up reveals details not seen in the master shot or missed by the general coverage, i.e. a hand opening a purse and pulling out a gun. A good example of this is Kyle Cooper's small, detailed shot in his title sequence for 'Se7en.'

Cut-Away

A single shot inserted into a sequence that momentarily interrupts the flow of action. Often used in new style documentaries such as 'Thin Blue Line' by Errol Morris.

Angle:

High Angle or Arial Shot

A shot from an angle above the subject/object.

Low Angle

A shot taken from the placement of the camera below the object.

 $\frac{3}{4}$ Shot

A shot that is positioned halfway between a frontal angle and a profile

Profile

When the camera is looking directly at an object.

Frontal

When the camera is looking directly at an object.

Over the shoulder

Usually a shot of a character in conversation with a second person.

Camera angle

Describes the position from which the audience is looking at the object or subject. Each new shot should have a new angle.

180 Degree Rule

This rule effectively said that the action of the subject or subjects is the center of a circle and that the diameter of that circle passes through the action and shooting is permitted within 180 degrees of one side of the circle only. If the line is crossed, this can look awkward and be spatially disorientating.

The 30 Degree Rule

When taking shots of action within the 180 degree rule, the camera should be placed not less than 30 degrees from the last position of the camera. This assists the reading of space by the audience.

Dramatic Angle

Adds to the emotional impact of the scene.

Composition, Movement and Perspective Techniques**Dutch**

The camera is tilted sideways, setting the objects off the vertical axis. The angle of the camera is such that the horizontal frame line is tilted.

Camera Height

The height of the camera has a considerable effect on the meaning of the shot.

